

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07

H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01

SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 IO-14 CU-04 AID-20 DRC-01 /154 W

----- 089839

P R 091135Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8922

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

CINCPAC

CDR USSAG NKP

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 3702

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, LA

SUBJECT: REACTION TO CABINET DECISION AGAINST  
REOPENING NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

REF: A) VIENTIANE 3557; B) VIENTIANE 3656

BEGIN SUMMARY: CABINET DECISION THAT NATIONAL ASSEMBLY  
SHOULD NOT OPEN MAY 11 HAS ADDED TO DEMORALIZATION OF LAO  
NON-COMMUNIST SIDE IN COALITION. FAILURE OF NATIONAL  
ASSEMBLY TO CONVENE DIRECTLY CONTRAVENES CONSTITUTION,  
BUT WAS NOT PARTICULARLY SURPRISING. MANNER IN WHICH  
CABINET DECISION WAS TAKEN WITH VIENTIANE SIDE "CAVING  
IN" TO PRESSURE SETS A POTENTIALLY SERIOUS PRECEDENT.  
ASSEMBLY LEADERSHIP IS SEEKING TO REVERSE DECISION BUT  
SO FAR WITHOUT MUCH PROSPECT OF SUCCESS. DESPITE RUMORS  
OF UNREST, OUR PRESENT ESTIMATE IS THAT LAOS WILL SURVIVE  
CONSTITUTION DAY WITHOUT DRAMATIC POLITICAL FIREWORKS.  
END SUMMARY

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1. CABINET DECISION OF MAY 2 THAT NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SHOULD

NOT OPEN MAY 11 AS CONSTITUTION REQUIRES HAS ADDED TO DEMORALIZATION OF NON-COMMUNIST SIDE IN VIENTIANE. NATIONAL ASSEMBLY'S STANDING COMMITTEE MET MAY 3 TO REVIEW SITUATION AND VARIOUS DEPUTIES EXPRESSED "DISAPPOINTMENT" AT CABINET DECISION. ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT PHOUI SANANIKONE CALLED UPON PRIME MINISTER MAY 4 TO SEEK EXPLANATION. ACCORDING TO RIGHTIST DEPUTY WHO ACCOMPANIED PHOUI, PRIME MINISTER EXPLAINED THAT CABINET WAS "NOT UNFAVORABLY DISPOSED" TOWARD ASSEMBLY BUT JUST COULD NOT REACH AGREEMENT THAT IT SHOULD REOPEN. PRIME MINISTER ALSO REPORTEDLY ALLUDED TO DANGERS OF STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS SHOULD ASSEMBLY MEET, VAGUELY SUGGESTING THAT OUTSIDE (THAI STUDENT) AGITATORS HAD STIRRED UP STUDENTS.

2. PHOUI AND OTHER ASSEMBLY LEADERS HAVE IMPRESSION THAT VIENTIANE SIDE HAD NOT PUT UP STRONG BATTLE IN CABINET FOR ASSEMBLY CONVOCAION AND THAT ISSUE HAD BEEN LOST BY DEFAULT. SISOUK SPOKE TO THIS POINT WITH AMBASSADOR, EXPRESSING BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT THAT OF ALL VIENTIANE SIDE MINISTERS, ONLY NGON AND HIMSELF HAD SPOKEN UP. PHOUI HAS ASKED FOR APPOINTMENT WITH KING (WHO ARRIVED VIENTIANE TODAY) TO APPEAL CABINET DECISION. HE IS REPORTEDLY PREPARED TO OFFER COMPROMISE TO KING, IN WHICH LATTER WOULD OPEN SESSION MAY 11 AND THEN PROROGUE IT AFTER SEVERAL DAYS OR WEEKS. THIS WOULD GIVE DEPUTIES OPPORTUNITY TO ELECT OFFICERS FOR COMING YEAR AND SELECT NEW STANDING COMMITTEE.

3. AS INDICATED REFTEL B, SOUVANNA ALREADY REVIEWED QUESTION WITH KING OVER WEEKEND AND IS CONVINCED THAT LATTER WILL ABIDE BY CABINET DECISION. SOME DEPUTIES ALSO SEEM RECONCILED TO THIS DEVELOPMENT AND ARE NOT REDUCED TO LAMENTING THAT OUTCOME MIGHT HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT "IF ONLY" PHOUI HAD GOTTEN TO LUANG PRABANG BEFORE SOUVANNA.

4. RESULT OF FOREGOING HAS BEEN ONSET IN SOME QUARTERS OF BITTERNESS AND OF FEELING THAT VIENTIANE CONSERVATIVES HAVE LOST OUT ON FIRST MAJOR ISSUE OF NEW COALITION. DEPUTIES AND OTHERS ON VIENTIANE SIDE ARE BEMOANING LACK OF UNITY AND LEADERSHIP ON THEIR SIDE AND PRIVATELY

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CRITICIZING FAILURE OF THEIR COLLEAGUES IN CABINET TO PROTECT THEIR INTERESTS. NGON SANANIKONE AND SISOUK NA CHAMPASSAK HAVE COME IN FOR SOME PARTICULARLY SHARP BARBS.

5. SOME GENERALS, VENTING EXASPERATION, HAVE DECLARED THAT THIS DEVELOPMENT SEEMS TO NARROW POSSIBILITY OF SUCCESS IN POLITICAL COMPETITION AND THAT MILITARY

FORCE MAY BE ONLY REMEDY. GENERALS WHO HAVE PURSUED THIS LINE OF IRRATIONALITY SEEM SO FAR TO BE FEW IN NUMBER, POSSESSING NO COMMAND AUTHORITY. OTHER MORE SOBER GENERALS ARE STILL CLINGING TO HOPE THAT KING MIGHT MAKE INDEPENDENT JUDGMENT IN FAVOR OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. IN THIS CONTAGIOUS ATMOSPHERE UNFOUNDED RUMORS ABOUT TROOP MOVEMENTS AND CONSTITUTION DAY COUP HAVE GAINED CURRENTLY. FOR EXAMPLE, ICC/CANDEL SIMARD INFORMED AMBASSADOR THAT IN HOUR-LONG INTERVIEW AFTERNOON MAY 9 WITH FOREIGN MINISTER PHOUMI VONGVICHIT, LATTER EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT SUCH STORIES. PHOUMI WONDERED ALOUD WHETHER U.S. AMBASSADOR AWARE OF SUCH RUMORS BUT SAID THAT, IN ANY CASE, HE BELIEVED AMERICANS WOULD HAVE NO ROLE IN SUCH EVENTS. AMBASSADOR CATEGORICALLY INFORMED SIMARD THAT STORIES HAVE NO BASIS AND THAT HE WILL SO INFORM PHOUMI THIS EVENING AT CZECH NATIONAL DAY OBSERVANCE. SIMARD THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE WELCOME REASSURANCE.

6. FAILURE OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO CONVENE IS NOT IN ITSELF SURPRISING NOR A GREAT LOSS, EXCEPT THAT IT DOES DIRECTLY CONTRAVENE CONSTITUTION. LPF HAVE LONG EMPHASIZED THEIR VIEW THAT CURRENT ASSEMBLY IS NOT LEGITIMATE BODY, AND CREATION OF JNPC BY INTERNAL LAO ACCORDS HAD ALREADY CLOUDED FUTURE OF ASSEMBLY. MANNER IN WHICH DECISION WAS TAKEN, HOWEVER, SETS POTENTIALLY SERIOUS PRECEDENT. LPF GAINED SOME INFLUENCE AMONG STUDENTS AND WERE ABLE TO GENERATE APPREHENSION THAT STUDENTS WOULD DEMONSTRATE AGAINST OPENING OF ASSEMBLY. VIENTIANE SIDE CAVED TO THIS PROSPECT IN CABINET MEETING. WITHOUT VIGOROUS EFFORTS ON PART OF VIENTIANE MINISTERS IN CABINET, PRIME MINISTER WAS UNABLE TO MUSTER, EVEN IF SO INCLINED, STRONG ARGUMENT FOR LETTING ASSEMBLY MEET. EPISODE REVEALS AGAIN INEPTITUDE AND DISARRAY ON SIDE OF CONSERVATIVES. THERE WAS NO NEED FOR PHOUI TO SEND REQUEST FOR OPENING THROUGH CABINET. SUCH PROCEDURE IS NOT CONFIDENTIAL

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REQUIRED EITHER BY CONSTITUTION, INTERNAL LAO AGREEMENTS OR CUSTOM. PERFORMANCE OF VIENTIANE SIDE HAS BEGUN TO LEAD TO MUTUAL RECRIMINATIONS AMONG CONSERVATIVES, WITH CONSEQUENT DEBILITATION OF THEIR SIDE AND STRENGTHENING BOTH PSYCHOLOGICALLY AND POLITICALLY OF LPF. OUR PRESENT ESTIMATE, HOWEVER, IS THAT LAOS WILL SURVIVE CONSTITUTION DAY WITHOUT ANY DRAMATIC POLITICAL FIREWORKS.

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## Message Attributes

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